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CHRIST'S REVELATION OF GOD

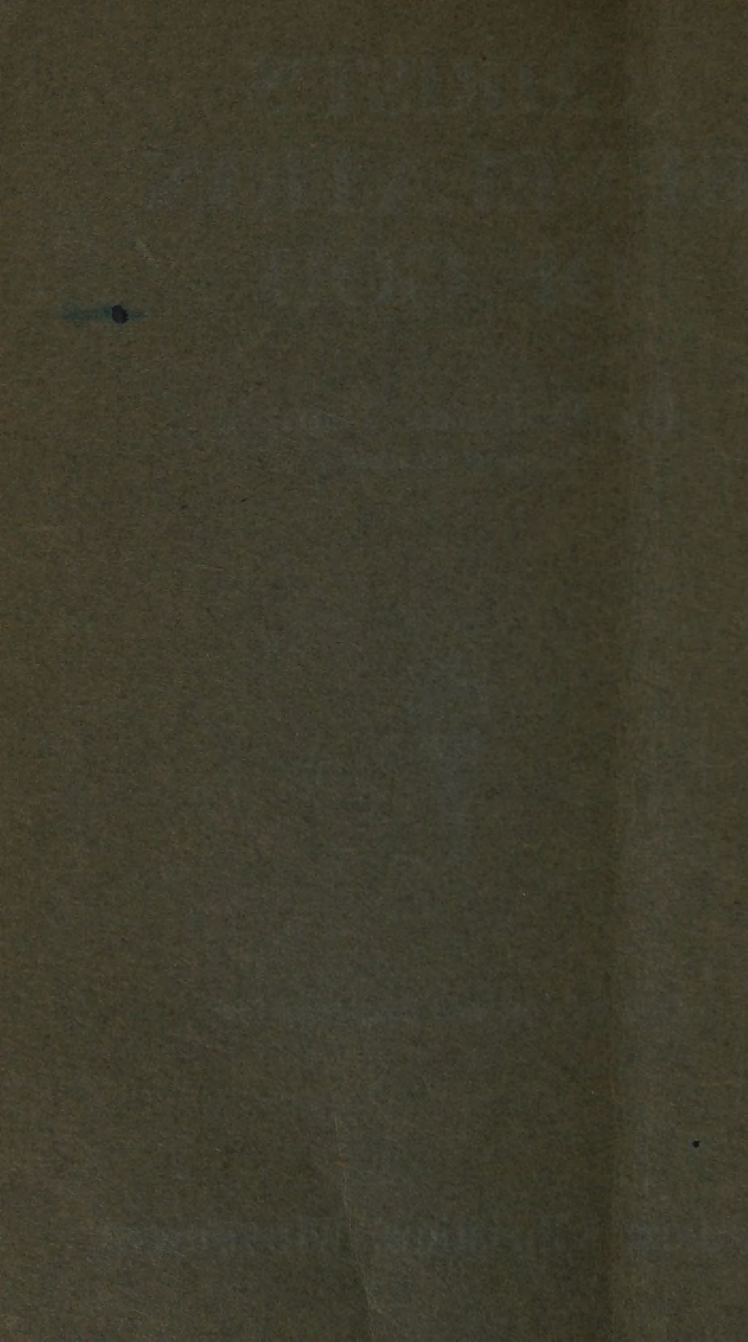
By William Temple

Bishop of Manchester



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Student Christian Movement



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Christ's Revelation of God

THREE LECTURES

BY

WILLIAM TEMPLE

BISHOP OF MANCHESTER

LONDON

STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

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*These three Lectures were delivered at the Conference
of the Student Christian Movement held in
Manchester in January 1925.*

I

WHAT OUR LORD PRESUPPOSED

I

WHAT OUR LORD PRESUPPOSED

CHRISTIANITY claims to be the truth. This is what supplies the basis of all its converting or missionary work. If it were, as some people suppose it to be, just a sort of drug appropriate to certain spiritual diseases, it would never be right to try to convert anyone until his spiritual condition had been diagnosed by an expert. Some such notion seems to be implied by those who say that we ought not to disturb the Africans, or the Indians, or the Chinese, but should leave them to the religion that suits them. Christianity is indeed the medicine for the ills of the world. But it derives its healing power from its truth. The Gospel nowhere shows a trace of interest in the psychological analysis of certain states of mind for which, when ascertained, it can prescribe a remedy. It consists of a proclamation which is either true or false; if it is true, the health of human life depends upon conformity to it; if it is false, its claim to provide guidance falls to the ground. The appropriate question is not, Does Christianity suit us? or the Africans? or the Indians? or the Chinese? The appropriate question is, Do we, or the Africans, or the Indians, or the Chinese, suit Christianity? The question is not, What are

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you going to do with Christ? The question is, What is Christ going to do with you?

This point cannot be over-emphasised. The Gospel does not begin with man's various needs and then offer ways of meeting them. The Gospel begins with God's truth, and calls upon men to live by it. A great deal of recent thinking about religion follows the other course. There is no harm in that, provide we do not force the Gospel into our mould. The philosophy of religion, and the comparative science of religions, are bound to start from the human end, for they must not make the assumption that the Gospel is the truth. If they reach that view at all, it will be at a late stage in their proceedings, after much evidence has been reviewed. But the Christian is one who, on whatever grounds, has accepted the Gospel, and, so far as he thinks about it, is engaged in working out what is involved in that assumption.

In my own view, that is the way in which, at the present development of our knowledge, Christian theology is bound to work. I do not believe that it is possible to arrive by cogent reasoning at the fundamental truths of Christianity. But if we make the hypothesis that they are indeed truths, we can, as I believe, indicate that hypothesis by the rational completeness of the system in which it issues. This is a perfectly legitimate course to take, and is as scientific as any other, provided that we recognise what we are doing and avoid deceiving ourselves into regarding as intellectually certain what is still for us an unverified assumption. Faith, as I think, precedes its own

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rational vindication, not only as a matter of usual experience, but as a matter of inherent necessity. But that does not mean that it is itself irrational; it only means that it is itself the illumination whereby its rational grounds are discovered.

All of this is more relevant to our immediate purpose than may at first sight appear. For it carries with it two implications which we must keep steadily in mind. The first is, that if the Gospel is what it claims to be, we read it rightly only if we have our minds fixed all the while on God, and think of human relationships as consequential on the character and purpose of God. It is true that the Gospel lays an emphasis which cannot be exaggerated on those human relationships. No other religious system carries the whole force of religious feeling into this realm so completely as Christianity. But the second great Commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is unalterably second, being a consequence of the first and not a possible substitute for it.

You have a graphic illustration of what I conceive to be the wrong way of treating the Gospels in Ruskin's book, *Unto this Last*. Ruskin has caused many readers of the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard to regard it as an illustration of how wages ought to be paid. I am sure this is completely wrong-headed. Whether or not wages ought to be paid solely according to need irrespective of desert or of the economic value of the labour remunerated, I am perfectly sure that this has nothing whatever to do with what our

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Lord then meant to impress upon His hearers. What that was, I shall describe in the next lecture ; but it was an aspect of the relationship between God and man, not of the relationship between one man and another.

The first implication, then, of the belief that the Gospel is offered as a revelation of the truth, not primarily as a remedy for certain ills, is that it is to be studied by minds directed towards God. It is directly concerned to answer the questions : Who and what is God ? What does He require of us ? How does He enable us to meet His own requirements ? It is only indirectly concerned with the questions : What have men discovered to be their chief needs ? How does God's provision satisfy these ? In this order of emphasis the New Testament is in true continuity with the Old, and I shall have in a moment to consider the validity of its method.

The second implication is that inasmuch as it claims to be truth, the Gospel must supply the clue to the whole of life and of reality. This claim forbids us to take it by itself and see how far it avails us, being content if it turns out to fit in with certain aspects of experience. But it is plain that the recorded life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth does not supply, in isolation, a complete philosophy. His teaching is markedly not systematic and deliberately avoids such completeness as would make it possible to treat it as a code of rules offered as a substitute for the Pharisaic code. He never teaches the existence of God ; He takes that for granted, and assumes that His hearers will know

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what He means by the Name of God when He utters it. Plainly, then, He does not begin at the beginning. Those who come to learn from Him are assumed to have received and to have accepted much teaching about God already. What He does is to supply a new centre or focus of illumination, in the light of which all their former knowledge is not abolished but transformed. And this corresponds with what the whole position of the Gospel must be in relation to the total range of human knowledge and experience, if it is to make good its claim to be the truth. It is not in itself the whole system of truth, for it is not a system at all; it is a proclamation, a disclosure. But it is a centre or focus of illumination in the light of which all other knowledge is not abolished but transformed.

It is with such general notions in mind that I would approach our consideration of "Christ's Revelation of God." And they particularly concern our consideration of the first question, "What did our Lord presuppose?" For, as we have seen, He did not come to write a new doctrine on the blank and empty tablets of minds till then without any religious convictions. He assumed a great body of conviction as already established. He did not come to give the first news about God; He came to reveal fully a God already revealed in part.

In quite general terms it is easy to answer our question. What our Lord presupposed was the Old Testament. There is no evidence of allusion to or interest in any other previous religious

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development. There was much in the higher philosophy of ancient Greece of which He could have made use; there was much in the religious traditions of Persia and India. To any of these there is no trace of a reference. But He assumes in His hearers not only acquaintance with, but acceptance of, the Old Testament; more than that, He appeals to it as an undeniable authority not only in controversy with opponents, but still more significantly in directing the purposes of His own life.¹

If then we are to have a clear conception of what our Lord presupposed, we must gain it by forming as full and accurate an impression as we can of the doctrine of God conveyed by the Old Testament. We need not for this purpose go into any questions of criticism, for all of these are irrelevant to the impression made by the Old Testament upon the minds of the quite uncritical folk from among whom the Lord chose His Apostles. But we must none the less bear in mind the fact that its impression upon them would be by no means the same as its impression upon an uncritical English reader in our own day. To the uncritical Englishman it is a single book, and its total impression is the average impression of all its parts. But the Jews of the first century were heirs of the tradition of which the books of the Old Testament are the record. To them inevitably, though very likely not consciously, it was a living thing, and, because living, also growing.

¹ Luke iv. 1-12; Matt. iv. 1-10. The special significance of the three Temptations is considered in Lecture III.

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This is a point of considerable importance. Citizens of a country which has a long history of growth and progress are actually moulded in their outlook by that history. Their own minds are its fruit. Consequently when they read it, they do so with minds which, however unconsciously, represent the growth and as a result take it for granted. People of another country, or another civilisation, read the same history with different unconscious presuppositions. Thus if I read the history of China, I read it from a point of view external to it; my judgment on it is formed by English, not by Chinese history. But when I read English history I do it with a mind which English history has moulded, so that my judgments upon it are in a sense part of it, for they are the judgments formed by the present phase of English history upon the process by which that phase has been reached. Now this is parallel to the position of a Jew of the first century in relation to the Old Testament. He was reading the history of which he was a product. But because he was a product he read it all in the light of its result. He could not help himself. He was that result, and must read the history in its light or else have no light by which to read it at all.

This brings us to a very important result. *The Apostles were not Biblical critics; but they read the Old Testament in a way that is only made possible for men of other races by Biblical criticism.* That is necessarily true of all men who read the history of their own nation. You read the history of your own nation as a development towards its

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latest phase, because you are yourself that latest phase. You read the history of another nation as a series of connected facts, but not necessarily as a development, unless and until you have acquired the historic point of view. The Apostles no doubt shared the prevalent belief that the Mosaic Law was the most sacred and most inspired portion of the Old Testament; but inevitably they read it through the eyes of the Second Isaiah, though they had no notion of his existence. Thus our inquiry into what our Lord presupposed does not involve us in any particular questions handled by critics; but it must involve us in acceptance of the general results of Biblical criticism; for the essence of this is that it regards the Bible as a growing thing and tries to trace out the course of its growth. Thus it leads us to take up towards the record consciously and explicitly the position inevitably held towards it, unconsciously and implicitly, by those who were themselves the products of the process it describes.

So when we say that our Lord presupposed the Old Testament, we must not think that, because the Apostles were not critics, this means that He presupposed what an uncritical English reader would find in the Old Testament. Rather we must say that, because the Apostles were actually the product of the Old Testament, He presupposed in them what a modern critical student finds in the Old Testament, though they would still quite naturally quote particular texts in a wholly uncritical fashion. The greatest gain of the critical study of the Old Testament is that it has restored

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to us an understanding of the old Scriptures very similar to that which came naturally and inevitably to the later Palestinian Jews.

What then shall we say is the resultant idea of God which the Old Testament, and the history which it describes, created in the minds of those to whom Christ brought His fuller revelation? Plainly a verbal statement of this will be to some extent fallacious, for it was a living whole, and our statement can only set out the various elements within it one by one. But of those elements the chief seem to be these: (1) God is One and Holy, and Holiness includes perfect Righteousness; (2) He is a Living God, not a mere Presence diffused through the world; (3) He is active in History; (4) His righteousness is, in His dealings with us, not only judicial but paternal, and He yearns over His children with love.

(1) *God is One and Holy, and Holiness includes perfect Righteousness.* The conviction that God is One pervades the Old Testament. It is true that various books bring before us stages of development when this position is not yet reached. Thus Jephthah, as represented in the Book of Judges, regards Jehovah as the God of Israel in no other sense than that in which Chemosh is the God of Moab.¹ Joshua's farewell to the people traces the belief in One God back to Abraham,² but does not appear to regard other gods as unreal.³ The first Commandment of the Decalogue puts the early faith in a practical form. Whether there are other

¹ Judges xi. 23, 24.

² Joshua xxiv. 2, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

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gods or not—that question is left open—there is only one for Israel to serve.

It is at least possible that the truth that there is only one God was first proclaimed by Amos. Anyhow for all the prophets from that time onwards this is regarded as a truth which it is impious to question. The people go on believing in other gods, not instead of but along with Jehovah, right down to the Exile.¹ In fact, one main reason why the Exile is so important a turning-point in the religious history of Israel is that the people went to Babylon while this point was still unsettled, but only those who had embraced the prophetic faith had the national stability to return, so that from the Return onwards Monotheism in the strict sense was finally established. But while it was the Exile and Return that established it among the people, it was the realisation of the Righteousness of God as He made Himself known to the prophets which led them to the assurance of His absolute unity. Abraham had anticipated this stage of development when he asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"² When once the Will of God is identified with the Moral Law, Monotheism is secure.

For us this perfect Righteousness is the first suggestion of the term Holiness. But it was not always so. As Otto Rudolf has made quite clear in his most important study called *The Idea of the Holy*,³ the earliest suggestion of this term is simply awe-inspiring mystery, and it is a great

¹ Cf. e.g. Jeremiah xliv.

² Genesis xviii. 25.

³ *Das Heilige*.

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advance when men first find this pre-eminently in the majesty of the Moral Law. At first man bows down in awe before whatever terrifies him. It is the mark of a great step taken when he recognises that nothing deserves his self-abasement in its presence unless it can command the allegiance of his conscience. Other peoples would have agreed with the mere words "God is holy." Only Israel knew that holiness included as its most indispensable element perfect righteousness.

Thus the Unity and the Righteousness of God went together in Israel's apprehension, and not only heightened but transformed the notion of Holiness, which they would have agreed with others in attributing to God. And while this conception of God was only reached with any clear consciousness by the prophets, and only established as the faith of the people by the Exile and Return, yet it absolutely pervades the Old Testament as we know it, because the whole was edited in its present form by adherents of this faith. It may be in part the record of men who held a lower doctrine; but the record itself reflects the convictions of the Prophets and their followers.

(2) *God is a living God.* This is the conviction which most of all distinguishes the Jewish conception of God from the highest results, or at least some of the highest results, of Greek philosophy or Indian Pantheism. Sometimes, no doubt, there is a childlike simplicity in the presentation; but the God of Israel is personal and active as neither Plato's Idea of Good or Royal Reason, or Aristotle's God eternally thinking thought, or the Hindu

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Brahma, can be said to be. The God of Israel watches over them, cares for them, is grieved by them. I believe myself that this belief in a living God provides a far more satisfactory philosophy, when once it is accepted, than any of those which represent God as either an indwelling and all-pervasive, but not transcendent, Presence, or those which conceive Him as dwelling apart in untroubled peace, indifferent to the agonies of the world which He has made. But though it provides a satisfactory philosophy, and therein establishes a claim to be accepted as true, I do not think it can be reached by philosophy in any other sense than as the best hypothesis at present available. Certainly it was not by philosophy that Israel reached it.

The crucial doctrine here is that of Creation. The Bible is perfectly clear in its teaching that the world exists by the creative activity of God, who exists Himself independently of His creation. The absolute supremacy of God as Creator is certainly an essential element in the theology of the Old Testament.

(3) *God is active in History.* This is almost identical with the last, but is an aspect of the conception of the living God so fundamental and so distinctive of the Old Testament that it must be mentioned separately. Most of the Old Testament is a history book. But it is a very special kind of history book. It is written to answer a quite different question from that which is in the minds of most historians. Their predominant interest is to answer the questions: What here was the purpose of men? How did this success,

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or failure, affect that purpose? But the Biblical writers always have another question in view: What here was the purpose, or the judgment, of God?

There is a very handy illustration in the comparison of the accounts given of two rebellions, both due, so far as men's purposes are concerned, to unpopular taxation. One is the English rebellion against Charles I. The historian sets out to make clear what were the taxes to which objection was taken—Forced Loans, Benevolences, Ship-money. Hampden, on grounds technically constitutional but essentially most irrational,¹ refused to pay ship-money, and so the fight began. You would probably complain rather fiercely of any historian who recorded the events of the reign of Charles I and only glanced at the question of taxation. Yet that is just what the Biblical writer does when he tells you the story of the rebellion against Rehoboam.² Of course a little use of imagination will put us on the right track. Solomon had gone in for magnificence; and when kings did that, their subjects had to pay. The House of the Forest of Lebanon is related to the rising of Jeroboam exactly as Versailles is related to the French Revolution. While the great monarch lived, the people endured the burden. When he died, they came to ask his son to make the yoke lighter. You have to guess that the yoke was taxes, until after the king's refusal you get just one hint. "Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was

¹ That the inland counties ought not to have to pay for the Navy.

■ 1 Kings xii. 1-20.

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over the levy; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died." What is the reason for this indifference to the matters that would seem to most historians to be essential? It is that the Biblical writer is not thinking chiefly of what men wanted; he is thinking of the purpose and judgment of God. He tells his story to set forth that purpose and judgment so far as his knowledge of God helps him to apprehend these.

The Prophets carry on the same tradition. Isaiah is greatly concerned that the question whether or not Judah should make an alliance with Egypt against Assyria should be decided by reference to God's purposes for His people.¹ But throughout the earlier history and the great prophetic period, Israel and Judah were little nations occupied with almost parochial concerns. With the Exile and the Macedonian invasion the Jews were brought into the sweep of great movements, the rise and fall of vast empires, in face of which their efforts to do more than maintain personal loyalty to Jehovah seemed futile. So Prophecy gives place to Apocalypse, and there is less concern to conform national policy to the divine will, but an even more impressive assertion of the control of history by the overruling providence of the Almighty.²

(4) *God's righteousness is not only judicial but paternal.* This is hardly apparent in the early stages, and never becomes predominant; but the paternal relationship, broadly speaking, receives

¹ Isaiah xxx. 1-5, 15-18.

² The chief example of Apocalypse in the Old Testament is, of course, the Book of Daniel.

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increasing emphasis. It is perceptible in the story of Abraham. With Moses it scarcely appears. For example, Moses pleads with Jehovah to deliver His people for the glory of His Name. He never appeals to God's love for them. But in Hosea this feature is strongly marked. The opening verses of his eleventh chapter are classical. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt; . . . I taught Ephraim to walk; I took them on my arms . . . I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." But in spite of this tenderness, even for Hosea the judicial relationship is predominant. It is only, I think, in some of the later Psalms that the paternal relationship becomes uppermost in the conception of God; but it is so, for example, in Psalm ciii.

"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
Long-suffering and of great goodness.
He will not alway be chiding;
Neither keepeth he his anger for ever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins,
Nor rewarded us according to our wickednesses.
For look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth;
So great is his mercy also toward them that fear him.
Look how wide also the east is from the west;
So far hath he set our sins from us.
Yea, like as a father pitieth his own children,
So is the Lord merciful unto them that fear him.
For he knoweth whereof we are made,
He remembereth that we are but dust." ¹

Here the thought of God is bordering on the Christian conception.

All of these, and other, elements constituted the

¹ Psalm ciii. 8-14 (Prayer Book Version).

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conception of God which was already in the minds of the Apostles when our Lord first called them to be His disciples. And all this He presupposed. We must not take His teaching out of its context and regard it as a complete system by itself. Like all teachers He was bound to give most attention to the changes that He wished to effect in the thought of His hearers. Where He was content that they should merely retain their old idea, He said nothing, but left the Old Testament to teach them. Whatever we can regard as the real upshot of the Old Testament revelation, that we must say that our Lord presupposes, and accept as part of His own teaching, unless He deliberately modifies it.

Our Lord then presupposed these convictions: that God is exalted in a peerless unity high above all existing things; that His Holiness consists chiefly in His perfect Righteousness; that He is the Creator of the world, not only an indwelling Presence; that He cares for its course and Himself takes action to guide its History; that He watches over His people with a father's care, not only demanding but desiring their obedience. If we want one verse which more than another sums it up, perhaps the best to choose is Isaiah lvii. 15: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

II

WHAT OUR LORD TAUGHT BY SPEECH

II

WHAT OUR LORD TAUGHT BY SPEECH

WE have seen that our Lord was in His teaching always addressing people to whom the Name of God already conveyed all that the writers of the Old Testament had combined to associate with it. As we turn to His own explicit teaching we must bear in mind His strong assertion of the permanency of this revelation—an assertion which He is recorded as making with the utmost emphasis when He was on the point of giving new doctrine which might otherwise appear to be a repudiation of the old. "Think not that I came to destroy the law, or the prophets : I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished." ¹

The Sermon on the Mount is in one most real sense a correction of the old Law. But it is a correction by way of completion, not by way of rejection. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is found in our Lord's treatment of the *lex talionis*—An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That principle looks to us like a sanction for vengeance. But that is a misunderstanding. The essence of the *lex talionis* is that it sets a limit to the naturally

¹ Matt. v. 17, 18.

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insatiate lust of revenge, which, if left to itself, will take two eyes for an eye and a set of teeth for a tooth. The *lex talionis* allows only such retribution as exactly equals the injury done, forbidding all satisfaction to the indignation felt against the injurer for beginning it. Our Lord was truly fulfilling or completing that process when He said that there should be no retaliation at all.¹

No doubt the chief reason for His insistence that He was completing and not destroying the Law lay in the fact that He was substituting the spirit for the letter as the source of moral guidance; and men very easily slip into the notion that the spirit is an easier master, more sympathetic and less exacting. But it is not so. A rule can be obeyed, and is then done with; the spirit is never done with. If a rule requires the giving of a tenth of one's worldly goods to God, one can keep the rule and enjoy oneself on what is left. But the spirit requires the dedication of all our goods, so that we never reach the point where we can leave God's claim on one side as satisfied; we are to use all our goods as we believe God would have us use them. Plainly, if we take it seriously, this is a far more exacting demand; but we know how easily we deceive ourselves, and escape from the rule without in any real sense accepting the control of the spirit. Therefore it was that He introduced what may be called the Law of the Spirit with the assertion that it completed, and did not destroy, the old Law, and made a greater demand than the most punctilious observers of

¹ I have attempted to work this out more fully in *Church and Nation* (Macmillan).

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the old Law were meeting. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."¹

St. Peter, we remember, wanted to have a rule to live by in that matter of forgiveness, on which his Master laid so terrifying an emphasis. He wanted to know what was the point when he might say, as we always want to say, "Well, I have overlooked his deceiving me three times and have been ready to help him again; but I don't think I can be expected to go on." Three times is perhaps about as much as our conscience usually requires. St. Peter was prepared for more than this, for there could be no doubt the Master did require a great deal in this respect; would seven times do? No, it would not. We are to forgive till seventy times seven, or (as no one could possibly count the injuries inflicted on him by one person up to four hundred and ninety) as often as we are injured.² A rule can be obeyed, so that we are then left free; but the spirit is constant and always requires action along the same lines; the spirit of forgiveness tells us to forgive every time. Truly the spirit is more exacting than the letter can ever be.

All of this may seem to be irrelevant to our purpose, which is to consider, not our Lord's ethical teaching, but His teaching about God. It helps us, however, in approaching that theme, to realise how completely and explicitly He did presuppose the Old Testament. But the points which I have selected in illustration of that theme have also

¹ Matt. v. 20.

² Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

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this special relevance, that they turn out on investigation to be, in fact, rooted in the conviction of the absolute and all-embracing sovereignty of God. For the penetrating and pervasive authority of the spirit is the moral aspect of a God whose overruling Providence nothing escapes; and this is the first point which I wish to mention in our Lord's teaching about God. For with no more introduction I propose now to pass on to those elements in that teaching which seem to me most conspicuous.

(1) First, I should put the assumption of *God's absolute supremacy*. No words can exaggerate the degree to which this everywhere determines our Lord's outlook upon the world and human life. There is, of course, nothing in the Gospels which remotely resembles a philosophic argument for the Being of God. It is even misleading to say that this is assumed, though being accepted without argument it is, of course, intellectually regarded, an assumption. But the intellectual aspect is very subordinate. God is for Jesus of Nazareth not an idea but a fact, and a fact incomparably more sure than any other. It is impossible to quote texts about this; from the nature of the case, it appears as a universally controlling influence, not as a special tenet. Perhaps it is rash to say that men only assert absolute certainty when they have doubts which they wish to quiet, but it would not be far from the truth. When Cardinal Newman says that for him there were, at any rate at one stage, only two luminous points of certainty—God and his own soul—I get a conviction that this was only so at certain times of exaltation, and that at other

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times he was even more acutely conscious of the physical world, his own body, his friends, his plans, Monsignor Talbot at the Vatican, and so forth. We do not affirm our primary certainties, at least as a general rule; they appear as a universal background of all our affirmations. Such is the assurance of the reality of God in the teaching of our Lord. Nothing is ever conceived except in its relation to God. Other facts may be omitted from consideration—trifles like the Roman Empire, or the possibility of capsize in a boat on a rough lake; but God is never for one moment absent from thought. It is God first, God last, and God all the time between.

Moreover, there is no assertion in set terms that God controls the world; but this is so much a part of the very meaning of His Name that the thought is as pervasive as the thought of God Himself. But it is surely characteristic that it is rather on God's care for the very little things than on His power over the very great things that our Lord loves to dwell. Perhaps this is because His power over the great things had been made familiar by the Old Testament; it was His care for the little things that needed to be brought home. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."¹ It is God who feeds the birds and clothes the grass of the field. We cannot imagine our Lord saying, as St. Paul once did, "Is it for the oxen that God careth?"² And all this reaches its culmination

¹ Luke xii. 6, 7; cf. Matt. x. 29, 30.

² 1 Cor. ix. 9.

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in our Lord's teaching about children—perhaps the most startlingly original of all His doctrines. No doubt He Himself loved children, but His teaching reflects much more than His human love for them; it has its root in His assurance of God's care for them.

In all these passages the note is tenderness, not the severity which is more easily suggested to our minds by the term sovereignty or supremacy. To the aspect of severity we shall come back. But we must not let the tenderness of God's care for the little things in His creation obscure the fact that this implies a truly universal sovereignty even more impressively than does the control of the general course of history by an Almighty Ruler.

(2) Closely connected with this thought of a universal supremacy of God, shown especially in care for the little things in creation, is *the sense of intimate relation between the Natural and the Moral Law*. Both alike are regarded quite simply as God's Will, and both alike are regarded as evidences of His character. Here again we are on Old Testament ground. To Israel all natural phenomena were activities of God, and the Laws of Nature and of Duty have never been more impressively co-related than in Psalm xix., where, as in Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*, the passage is direct from the movements of the heavenly bodies, as they declare the glory of God, to that undefiled law which converts the soul and gives wisdom to the simple. But in parables and illustrations our Lord presses this implication of God's universal sovereignty to a length elsewhere unparalleled. Everyone who

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stops to think at all as he reads the New Testament must see how constantly He uses the ordinary processes of Nature as illustrations of God's method, with the implication that His method in the moral sphere must be the same. But sometimes we find something more emphatic than parables; nothing can be more explicit than the evidence that God is "kind toward the unthankful and evil"¹ afforded by the sun and the rain. "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."²

This leads us to the most distinctive element in our Lord's teaching about God. But before we pass on to that we must notice His occasional warnings that we cannot interpret any particular occurrences in the light of our limited knowledge of God's purposes. The believer who prays, and receives the boon for which he prays, will naturally connect the two. But he cannot prove that the boon was not coming to him anyhow. There is, however, little harm in too easily attributing what we welcome to the direct and special activity of God, so long as we avoid all tendency to suppose ourselves His favourites. The danger comes when men attribute to the direct and special activity of God untoward events, especially those which befall other people. It is very hazardous to see God coming in judgment when calamities come to ourselves or to others—specially to others, for this tends to self-righteousness. So we are warned not

¹ Luke vi. 35.

² Matt. v. 44, 45.

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to think the victims of cruelty or of accidents specially wicked, or that their sufferings are a divinely inflicted punishment.¹ No doubt all that happens falls within God's purpose, and those who seek and follow that purpose will find how even what seems evil gives opportunities to fulfil it.² But we do not know enough of that purpose either in its range or in its detail to acclaim any event, especially any event that involves suffering, as a direct result of the divine activity. We must not say of earthquakes or of military defeats, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!"³ Our concern with God's purpose is not to understand its universal range, but to find and obey that in it which concerns ourselves, confident that if we are really trying to live in His obedience and fellowship, all things, even those which in themselves are evil, will become occasions of good.

(3) We come now to something which is so great an extension of anything in the Old Testament, and so complete a readjustment of its whole balance, as to be completely original. This is our Lord's insistence on *the indiscriminate love of God*. The chief passage is that lately quoted about the sun and the rain. But it pervades the whole Gospel. Amos had long ago extended what Israel had learnt of God's guidance of history to other nations besides Israel. God did, indeed, care for Israel, but He cared equally for the Ethiopians; He had indeed

¹ Luke xiii. 1-5.

² John ix. 1-3.

³ Luke xvii. 24. I have tried to express what I conceive to be the Christian theory of accident in *Christus Veritas* (Macmillan), pp. 192-199.

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brought Israel out of Egypt, but so too had He brought the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir.¹ But though He had equal care for them all, it was rather as a King demanding from all His due than as a Father watching over them all with love. Moreover, the extension of belief in God's all-ruling Providence was demanded by the realisation of His Unity. If there is only one God, that God must have control of all nations. But what our Lord teaches goes far beyond all this. It is not only that God declares Himself to all peoples and from all demands obedience, rewarding and punishing all alike as they give or withhold their obedience; He is now declared to love all alike, whether they obey or disobey. St. Paul plainly feels this to be a truly revolutionary disclosure.² God, as Jesus Christ teaches us to understand Him, loves all His children with an unquenchable love. They may ignore Him, betray Him, defy Him; they may in ways innumerable wound His love. But He always goes on loving them, with a love undiminished by their ingratitude.

In one sense we are so familiar with this element in Christ's teaching, that a re-statement of it has a platitudinous air. In another sense, we are so far from appreciating its real significance that its implications are utterly unperceived even by those who would most loudly assert its familiarity. For what is here at stake is the whole of the relation of religion to morality. There is a long tradition in human thought, according to which the very existence of God is chiefly established by His

¹ Amos ix. 7.

² Romans v. 6-8.

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vindication of the Moral Law. The most conspicuous representative of this tradition is the great philosopher Kant. But this seems, at first sight, to be imperilled by a declaration that God's love for the wicked is no less than His love for the (comparatively) righteous. No doubt Kant is more concerned with the need for securing the association of happiness with goodness than with that of ensuring the punishment of the wicked. But even so, and even granting that love for the wicked may show itself in punishing them, it is very hard to fit such a saying as that about the sun and the rain into the context of the *Metaphysic of Ethics*.

That a religious doctrine should apparently conflict with a great tradition of human thought is a serious matter. What is more serious is that this tradition is itself central and pivotal for the Old Testament. That Ethical Monotheism which is the distinctive doctrine of Israel rests on the faith in God as vindicator of righteousness, by the preservation of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked. We are indeed assured that God takes no pleasure in the death of the sinner;¹ and we have repeated expressions of the love wherewith He waits and longs for their return to obedience. But this is still subordinate. Pre-eminently He is King and Judge. Even if it were admitted that He was conceived as grieving over those whom He destroys, there can be no doubt that this indiscriminate bounty to evil and good alike is foreign to the thought of the Old Testament, and at first sight destructive of its whole scheme of doctrine.

¹ Ezekiel xviii. 32.

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But in fact our Lord is here, too, completing and not destroying the Law. For the whole purpose of the Law and of its punishments is not to secure that the wicked are punished, but to keep people from wickedness by the fear of punishment. We always get our whole conception of Law wrong if we think of it only in relation to those who are proved guilty of breaking it. Far the greater part of its influence is exerted in checking people from doing what it forbids. Mr. N. P. Birley, in a recent textbook of English History between 1660 and 1714, says of the provision concerning the removal of unworthy judges in the Act of Settlement of 1701: "This enactment has been so effective that it has never been necessary to use it." Indeed it is true that if a Law perfectly attains its object, no one will ever be prosecuted under it. For its object is to prevent the commission of some crime; and if that object is attained, that crime is never committed.

When people clamour for the vindication of the Moral Law by the punishment of the wicked, they always think of the wicked as being someone else. They are not demanding the condign punishment of their own sins. But the only right way to inquire what is the moral influence of any conception of God, is for the inquirer to ask what is its effect upon him. Undoubtedly this influence mainly consists in the unconscious tendency of every worshipper to imitate his God. If the God be conceived as vindictive, the worshipper will become vindictive. But that is to fix him in the self-centredness from which above all things he needs to be delivered.

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But if the God be conceived as universal love, the worshipper will tend to become more and more unselfish and loving. Further, it is in the thought of God's love for him that each worshipper finds his highest incentive to goodness; and just when he fails to find it insufficient to carry him over some cause of special alienation, and when he would indulge his dislike if he could possibly regard the object of his dislike as being in the disfavour of God, he is carried on to real love even of an enemy by the recollection that God loves that enemy as truly as himself.

So soon then as I escape from the Pharisaic attitude of thinking what my conscience requires that God should do to someone else, and reach the Christian temper which asks what God wishes to do with me, I find that the apparently non-moral doctrine of God's indiscriminate love is precisely that which alone can give me the new energy of righteousness which I need.¹

✓ (4) The doctrine of God's indiscriminate love finds its fullest expression in *our Lord's teaching about forgiveness*. The Parable of the Prodigal Son² makes it perfectly clear that God is always ready to receive back into His favour His self-willed children. It is true that the Prodigal had first to come to himself and set out on the homeward journey before he could be received. But that was in the nature of the case. The Father did nothing to keep him away till certain conditions

¹ I have tried to work this out more fully in the chapter on "God in the Light of the Incarnation" in *Christus Veritas*.

² Luke xv. 11-32.

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were fulfilled. It is often said that our Lord's doctrine is that of free forgiveness on the sole condition of repentance ; but if by forgiveness is meant the readiness and desire to restore the old relations of love and intimacy, then there are no conditions at all. God always and unceasingly desires to maintain those relations and to restore them as soon as ever we break them. But there is a condition that we must fulfil if we are to make our own the forgiveness which God always and freely offers. And it is noticeable that repentance is not, in fact, mentioned in this connection. The one thing that is mentioned, and that with a most solemn reiteration, is our forgiveness of those who have injured us or are in our debt. The prayer for forgiveness is the only petition in the Lord's Prayer to which any condition is attached ; and it is this condition. The lesson is driven home by the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant ;¹ and part of the significance of this is concealed by our unfamiliarity with the monetary terms employed. The debt which the king was ready to forgive was about two and a half million pounds—such a debt as could never be repaid, so that the plea, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all," was certainly an idle one. But the debt which that same servant refused to forgive was about £5, which might easily be repaid. For indeed our debt to God is infinite and cannot be repaid ; to Him we owe every moment of our time and every ounce of our strength, so that even if we are utterly devoted for the future without fault or defect, that cannot make good our failures

¹ Matt. xviii. 23-35.

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in the past. But He freely forgives, unless we block His forgiveness by our own refusal to forgive the comparatively trifling injuries which are all that our fellow-men can do to us. But that refusal is fatal.

This is not hard to understand. Forgiveness does not mean remission of penalty, but restoration to the old relationship of children with our Father. But He cannot restore us to His own intimacy if we decline to be on brotherly terms with His other children. If in a family one member has quarrelled with his father and with the rest, the father may long to have him back, but he cannot do so unless he can be friends with the others. Or, to put the matter more theologically, forgiveness is restoration to fellowship with God; and God is love; to be in fellowship with God is therefore to be filled with the spirit of love, and in so far as we remain unloving towards anyone we shut ourselves out from the fellowship of God.

I am at present attending only to what Christ taught by speech; the next lecture will supplement this by calling attention to what He taught by action. So we shall come to the connection between His Death and our forgiveness. But the upshot of His spoken teaching surely is this: God bears no resentment; you may by the sinful state of your will enter into antagonism against God, and then, of course, He is your antagonist; but that is of your choice, not His, and He always desires that change in you which will end His antagonism; one condition, and only one, He makes, but that is utterly indispensable—it is that you

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extend to others the same forgiveness that you seek from Him.

✓ (5) What has been said about love and forgiveness is gathered up in the doctrine of *God's Fatherhood*. The use of the term was not new, but the intensity of meaning which our Lord put into it was so new that men felt bound to keep the Aramaic word that He used even when they were writing Greek. That surely is the explanation of the phrase, "Abba, Father"¹ Everywhere we are to interpret our relations to God and His dealings with us in the light of this family relationship. So we get beyond any notions of anything like legal justice either as between God and man or as between one man and another in His sight. The main point of the Parable of the Unjust Judge is, no doubt, the need for that undaunted faith of which persistent prayer is the expression; but it also strongly implies that people who will think of God as Judge, instead of thinking of Him as Father, and Judge only so far as a father is a judge to his children, will find Him acting on very unjudicial principles.²

So too the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, in addition to its main lesson, seems to say that if we will treat God as an employer or taskmaster, and not as our father, He will seem most arbitrary.³ But here the main point is very relevant. St. Peter had just asked what reward the disciples might expect for all that they had left to follow Christ. The answer is that they will indeed receive most abundant reward; but if they are in the frame of

¹ Mark xiv. 36; Rom. viii. 15; Gal. iv. 6.

² Luke xviii. 1-8.

³ Matt. xx. 1-16.

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mind which looks for rewards proportioned to service rendered, they will be disappointed. Then comes the story of the labourers hired at different times ; of how the employer specially arranged that they should be paid in reverse order, so that when those who had only worked for one hour received the full day's wage, the hopes of the others were sure to be raised ; of the disappointment which they felt when they received the same ; and of the employer's justification of his act by reference to his arbitrary will. Of course, it is all wrong in relations between an employer and labourers. But, of course, it is all right in the family. The oldest child does not complain because the youngest has an equal share of the parents' love, or claim larger presents because he has been obedient for a longer time. So it is in our service of God. He rewards those who serve Him well, but no question of justice between Him and us, or between ourselves in His sight, can ever arise if we properly understand the situation ; He is our Father and we are His children. This is a realm quite other than the world of claims and counter-claims to which justice belongs.

✓ (6) But *God is King as well as Father* ; indeed the world to which Christ points us is one where the Father is King and the King is Father. All that is said about the Kingdom of God reminds us of that Divine Sovereignty which our Lord presupposed as already taught by the Old Testament. And while we know that the Father desires us to approach Him gladly, we on our side cannot approach the King except with reverence. And in this reverence there must be found what the Old Testament

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means by "the fear of the Lord." This is not just fright of what He may do to us, which is a purely selfish and, if chronic, a demoralising emotion; it is the sense of unworthiness and littleness and helplessness before the All-holy and All-mighty. To men brought up on the Old Testament there was little need to dwell on this; but we must remind ourselves that our Lord, far from repudiating this, reinforced it in very terrible words. We are to remember that there is a fear due to God which can never be due to our worst enemy on earth. "I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath authority to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him."¹

✓ (7) This naturally leads us to the thought of *Judgment*, many aspects of which lie beyond our present scope. But we must not dwell on the indiscriminate love and free forgiveness of God without supplementing this by His terrible severity as our Lord teaches us to know Him. For those who try and trust there is His gracious promise; but for those who either do not try, or who proudly rely on their own righteous will, there is dreadful warning. The love of God is not a sentimental readiness to give us what we happen to want; it is a passionate yearning to raise us to its own likeness, knowing that this is best for us; and, therefore, for very love's sake God will be relentlessly stern against all in us that is self-centred; our lower

¹ Luke xii. 4, 5; cf. Matt. x. 28.

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nature and unconverted hearts are likely often to think Him cruel. If you are not perfect in love, and still do not tremble before God, you have not understood the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What are the words of Incarnate Love on the threshold of the Passion wherein His Love was most perfectly revealed? "The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner. Every one that falleth on that stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust." ¹

Because God is Love, He desires the answering love of His children; but that must be freely given, for otherwise it is not love at all. Therefore, because God is love, He gives us the awful responsibility of freedom. We are free, if we so choose, to repel His love. We may even do this with such completeness, according to the most natural interpretation of Christ's words, that we are shut out utterly from His Presence; that is Hell. And if we believe in Hell, it is because we believe so completely in the love of God.

(8) This responsibility of freedom would be an impossible burden were it not for the last point which I propose to mention in our Lord's teaching about God; this is *the Gift of the Spirit*. Hitherto my references have been almost entirely to the Synoptic Gospels; now our main concern is with the Fourth. But for our present purpose this need cause no misgiving on critical grounds, whatever we may think about the historic value of the

¹ Luke xx. 17, 18; cf. Matt. xxi. 42, 44.

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Fourth Gospel, for the main point is contained in the Synoptic Gospels also.¹ Plainly we cannot go into one of the main doctrines of the Christian faith at this point. But the promise of Christ is clear. If a man opens his heart to the Father's love as made known through the human life of the Son, he finds within himself and in the fellowship of his co-disciples a power of answering love and service which is more than his own, and which at last if not at first he recognises as the Holy Spirit. God loves and calls us to an answering love ; but we are not left to offer the unworthy response of which alone we are capable ; the love with which we answer is God Himself within us.

¹ Luke xi. 13 ; xii. 12.

III

WHAT OUR LORD TAUGHT BY ACTION

III

WHAT OUR LORD TAUGHT BY ACTION

As the first missionaries went about their work, no doubt they left behind them some record of our Lord's utterances, so that their converts should have, as far as possible in His own words, the principles of the life to which by Baptism the converts were committed. In fact there seems to be good reason for thinking that the earliest part of the material now contained in the Synoptic Gospels was a collection of the sayings of the Lord; the matter common to the First and Third Gospels, but not given by St. Mark, is generally supposed to come from an early source used by both evangelists. This is called "Q," and it consists almost entirely of teaching. And, as I have said, it is very likely the earliest of all the material which has been worked up into the Synoptic Gospels.

But while it is likely that the Lord's spoken teaching was the first part of the Gospels to be written, there can be no doubt at all that His Life and Death played a greater part than His words in converting souls. St. Paul may have left copies of "Q" or some similar document behind him when he left a city where he had preached. But his preaching, by his own testimony, concerned the Cross and Resurrection rather

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than the Sermon on the Mount. He proclaimed a crucified Messiah rather than a supreme religious teacher. And in his Epistles he scarcely refers to the ethical teaching of the Lord, while he dwells constantly on His Death and Resurrection from the dead. It is when we turn to what our Lord taught by action that we reach what all the saints have found to be the heart of His revelation of God.

But here we presuppose the Incarnation, which is the central doctrine of the Christian faith. Always remember that the real meaning of that doctrine is not to be found in what it affirms concerning a historical person—Jesus of Nazareth—but in what it affirms concerning the Eternal God. The religious interest, if that expression may be allowed, of asserting the Deity of Christ is found in the consequent faith that God, the Eternal and Almighty, is like Jesus Christ, that His character is the character of Jesus Christ. Here we assume that doctrine,¹ and can go on to consider some of our Lord's actions in the light of His declaration, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."²

(1) We begin with *the threefold Temptation*. No doubt the record of this comes from our Lord Himself, for He was alone at the time. The story is His own statement (of course in parable form) of the problem which confronted Him when at

¹ If anyone is interested to see how I should approach the defence of it, I must refer him to the chapter on "The Godhead of Jesus Christ" in *Christus Veritas*.

² John xiv. 9; cf. Col. i. 15; Heb. i. 3.

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His Baptism He knew that He was called to begin His work as Messiah. There were various forms of Messianic expectation, and no doubt many devout Jews held them all at once, as popular religion commonly combines a large assortment of incompatible beliefs. There is no harm in this, so long as it is only the figures and metaphors which are incompatible, not the substance behind them. But He who was actually to do the Messianic work of inaugurating the Kingdom of God must of necessity adopt some one method. Now broadly speaking the old conceptions all rested on, or at least contained, some element either of bribery or of force. The Messianic banquet¹ suggested an appeal to men's love of comfort and luxury; the King who should rule in perfect righteousness from the throne of David² suggested the use of such compulsion as is part of the machinery of all earthly governments; the appearance of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven³ suggested such a display of unquestionable authority that doubt or resistance would be inconceivable. Now these are precisely the methods which our Lord rejected at the outset of His ministry.⁴ He would not use His power, where-with as Messiah He was endowed, to satisfy His own wants or those of others as a means to establishing His Kingdom; He would not adopt the methods of the Prince of this world to win the world for

¹ Isaiah xxv. 6; cf. Luke xiv. 15.

² Isaiah ix. 6, 7.

³ Daniel vii. 13, 14.

⁴ Luke iv. 1-12; Matt. iv. 1-10.

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His Kingdom; He would not give the "sign from heaven" which would make all doubt of His divine mission impossible.

That is so far, of course, a purely negative result. But, like all negatives, it rests on a positive basis. These methods were rejected because they were all incompatible with what turns out to be the one foundation of the Kingdom—the free response of human hearts and consciences and wills to the appeal of perfect love. At present the way is made clear for this, but that is all. Before we go on, however, it is worth while to notice that the thought of compelling men to accept Christ's authority had to be constantly repudiated, for the disciples had not abandoned it. A striking illustration occurs in the scene where the sons of Zebedee wished to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans who would not receive Him.¹ Just before His arrest our Lord was conscious of the possibility of summoning celestial aid against His captors.² But most impressive of all is His treatment of Judas. The Lord knew what was in his mind. He had given the directions to the two disciples, who were to prepare the Last Supper, in a kind of cypher³—presumably so that the traitor should not know and bring the soldiers there. At that Supper He says that one of them will betray Him; so Judas knew that he was detected. It would have been easy to give the name and bid the disciples act; there were, we know, two swords in that room;⁴ or we may be

¹ Luke ix. 51-56.

² Matt. xxvi. 52, 53.

³ Mark xiv. 12-16; Luke xxii. 7-13.

⁴ Luke xxii. 38.

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sure that Peter and the two Sons of Thunder would have been ready to bind the traitor there while the Lord escaped. But He only gave the hint, which explained His action, to the beloved disciple.¹ To the traitor, who knew himself detected, He made the appeal of love by singling him out for especial honour.² That appeal, so made, must soften his heart or harden it. It hardened it, and the beloved disciple saw the fact in his face.³ The Lord saw it too, but still refused to go back from love to force; He would have no unwilling disciples; if a chosen friend chose to be a traitor, a traitor let him be: "That thou doest, do quickly."⁴ And Judas passed out under the Lord's protecting silence.

Now remember: what we are watching is not merely the mutual dealings of two persons who lived long ago. We are watching the revelation once for all of the Eternal God in His dealing with the souls of men. He still appeals to us as our Father in the name of His love; we may reject that appeal if we will. If, called to be sons, we choose to be traitors, we may. Is it not true that there is nothing so merciless as the love of God? For indeed it would seem like mercy that He should forcibly prevent Judas—or me—from betraying Him. Yes—mercy to that lower and weaker self in us which asks love to be indulgent. But God pays us the terrible compliment of appealing always to what is best in us and never overrides our freedom.

¹ John xiii. 21-26.

³ John xiii. 27.

² John xiii. 26.

⁴ John xiii. 27.

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There is judgment, truly, as we saw in considering our Lord's spoken teaching. When He calls by kindness and we will not hear, He calls by judgment, to give us a new chance that way. But even though the judgment brings bitter suffering, He still will not force us to learn its lesson. All our Lord's dealings with men declare this fact concerning God: *God respects men's freedom to the uttermost, even though they use it to wound Him and to destroy themselves.*

(2) We find an application of this principle and much else besides when we come to consider our Lord's *Miracles*. Here I wish to call attention to three points:

(a) *He never appeals to His miracles as evidence of His authority, but, on the contrary, deprecates the public interest which they excite.* Possessed of power and confronted with need, love cannot but use the power to satisfy the need. So He heals those who are diseased. But He often tells them to say nothing about it. And when, after a great number had been healed in Capernaum, the excitement rose very high, He withdrew for solitary prayer in the night; and to St. Peter, no doubt elated by the signs of public interest, and bringing the news that all were seeking Him, He replied, "Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may proclaim [the Kingdom] there also."¹ As He goes a leper comes and asks for healing. The Lord heals him, but charges him sternly to tell no one; the word translated "sternly" or

¹ Mark i. 35-38.

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“strictly” suggests anger; this further healing was contrary to His purpose.¹

Now we have here a balance of considerations which it is important to hold steadily. In the first place, the Lord does heal men's bodily ills; there is no suggestion that these represent the will of God in such sense that they ought to be passively endured, or that to cure men's physical condition is other than spiritual work. But in the second place all this is incidental; the main purpose is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and public excitement about miraculous cures is regarded as a hindrance to the growth of the spiritual work for which Christ came. Or, in other words, God wills our health and all else that is for our temporal welfare; but He does not put this first; and if we put it first, or come to Him chiefly for such boons as these, we misunderstand both Him and His gift.

(b) *The miracles of Christ are an assertion of the subordination of the physical to the spiritual.* We make a great mistake when we speak of them as breaches of Natural Law. A law of Nature affirms that a particular cause must have a particular effect. Here we have an unusual cause and an unusual effect. This is no breach of any law of Nature; each miracle is an instance of a law of which there may be no other instances. But, in fact, our Lord teaches us to regard His miracles, for the most part at least, as illustrations of a law of which we can ourselves make use.² But the condition of success is of course the reality of our devotion.

¹ Mark i. 40-44; the word in question is ἐμβριμῶμενος.

² John xiv. 12.

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N. | Nature is God's creation; it is when our wills are the channels of God's Purpose that they can control the physical world. Our Lord's human will was always thus the channel of God's Purpose.

(c) But the chief characteristic of our Lord's miracles remains to be noticed; it is the subordination of power to love. Perhaps we grasp this best by the help of the inquiry made by John the Baptist and our Lord's answer.¹ St. John the Baptist had launched a great movement which had profoundly shaken the nation. He made much more stir in his own lifetime than our Lord made in His earthly ministry. He was an embodiment of power, even though he worked no miracles. And he had recognised our Lord as one greater, even immeasurably greater, than himself, and had spoken of Him as the Lamb of God which beareth away the sin of the world.² Then had come his imprisonment; and in his prison he heard about the works of this greater follower. And it was those works which made him doubt. It was "when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ" that he sent to ask whether what he hoped was true after all. For nothing was happening of the kind that changes the course of history. There were some blind men who could see, some deaf men who could hear, a few dead folk who were alive again, and a number of poor people cheered by good news. Could this be the way that the Kingdom of God would come?

¹ Luke vii. 18-35; Matt. xi. 2-19.

² Mark i. 7; Luke iii. 15-17; Matt. iii. 11, 12; John i. 19-36; iii. 27-30.

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The answer is merely to put before John again the facts which had caused his anxiety, with the significant addition, "Blessed is he that is not scandalised at me." Then the people are told that John is indeed a prophet and the greatest of the prophets; yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater. What does all this suggest? Certainly it suggests that somewhere in these works is to be found the evidence of divine presence. St. John the Baptist is so far above the level of the crowd as to be free from their excitement at the wonder of the miracles that, on the contrary, they seem to him an insufficient display of the divine power. But he is still below the level of the Kingdom. For what, after all, is the most striking feature of our Lord's miracles? It is that *power is always subordinate to love*. Having this power, He never uses it for Himself, nor to impose His will on others, but always and only in giving service. This is the divine use of power; and to realise that in God's order, and in His dealings with men, power is always subordinate to love, is to grasp the distinctive element in the Christian doctrine of God, the fundamental principle of the Kingdom of God.

(3) It was especially at the end of His ministry that our Lord taught by action. After He had been recognised freely by St. Peter at Cæsarea Philippi, He began for the first time to say what was *the Messianic act by which He would inaugurate the Kingdom of God*, namely, that He should "suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and

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after three days rise again.”¹ And at once He started on the journey to Jerusalem which ended on Calvary. But first, as it were in preparation, He gave Himself to that ecstasy of communion with the Father which is set before us in the story of the *Transfiguration*, wherein the Head of the Law and the Head of the Prophets spake with Him of the Exodus—for Him “decease,” for His people deliverance—which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.² So He prepared Himself, and His closest friends, for the journey and its climax. As they went He strode before them with something in His manner that amazed and terrified them.³ Arrived in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem He deliberately fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy by entering in triumph riding upon an ass, thereby at once claiming Messiahship and indicating that His Messiahship was peaceful and based on humility.⁴ Arrived there, He purges the Temple courts, interfering on His own authority with a commerce which had the sanction of custom and was conducted under the auspices of, and largely for the profit of, the High Priest.⁵ In all of these we see *the claim to divine authority coupled with a complete absence of self-concern*. As we see God in Jesus Christ

¹ Mark viii. 27-31; Luke ix. 18-22; Matt. xvi. 13-21. For the word “freely” in the text cf. Matt. xvi. 17.

² Mark ix. 2-8; Luke ix. 28-36 (the word “Exodus” is in v. 31); Matt. xvii. 1-8.

³ Mark x. 32.

⁴ Mark xi. 1-10; Luke xix. 29-40; Matt. xxi. 1-11; John xii. 12-19; Zech. ix. 9.

⁵ Mark xi. 15-18, 27-33; Luke xix. 45-xx. 8; Matt. xxi. 12-14, 23-27.

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we learn to believe in Him as absolutely sovereign by right and by power, yet always making His claim for the sake of the people to whom He makes it, never for any satisfaction of Himself except the satisfaction which love finds in answering love.

(4) So we come to the *Last Supper*. The order of events is not quite clear. I have already spoken of the last appeal made to the traitor-disciple. In all the wealth of material for meditation in that whole episode I will now mention only two points.

(a) The first is *the washing of the disciples' feet*.¹ It was, so St. John had learnt to realise, in a special consciousness of His Deity—"knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God and went unto God"—that He performed the act of menial service. Thus God—the Eternal, Almighty, Glorious God—serves His children. It is a supreme revelation of the divine humility. And to accept it calls for a complete humility in men. St. Peter at first is horrified; then, when he is told that loyalty involves acceptance, he wants to ask for more than is offered. The last resort of human pride is to attribute a proud dignity to the object of its worship. But even that has to go. In the light of Christ's revelation no place is left for pride at all. When God comes among men, it is as their servant.²

(b) The other episode at the Last Supper which imperatively claims our attention is the first

¹ John xiii, 1-10.

² Cf. Mark x. 42-45; Luke xxii. 24-27.

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Eucharist.¹ We must not now go into any difficult questions. Nor are we at the moment concerned with the teaching here given with regard to the nature and implications of our discipleship. We are concerned only to ask, What here do we learn about God? The answer is simple and is in line with all the rest of our Lord's teaching about God. It is this: *God gives Himself, at any cost to Himself, to be the life of our souls, if we will have it so.* Our Lord took the Bread, of which He said that it was His Body; He gave thanks for it, He blessed it, He broke it, He gave it. So our Lord, we know, was treating His Body. When He let Judas go, He condemned Himself (humanly speaking) to the Passion. Because Judas was then in His power, His Death was a voluntary sacrifice.² That is why the life-giving sacrifice is for evermore associated with "the same night in which He was betrayed."

(5) By His action at the Last Supper our Lord gave His disciples the clue whereby to understand *the Passion*. His deeds and words together had been plainly sacrificial. He had spoken of a new covenant between God and Man, ratified, as the old covenant had been, with blood; but the new covenant was ratified with His own Blood. So He led them to understand that His Death, which had the appearance of an execution, was in reality a sacrifice. But the victim offered in the sacrifice was no symbolic substitute; it was Himself.

If it was impossible in these lectures to attempt

¹ I Cor. xi. 23-25; Mark xiv. 22-25; Luke xxii. 14-20; Matt. xxvi. 26-29.

² Cf. John x. 17, 18.

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any real discussion of the doctrines of the Holy Spirit or the Eucharist, still more is it impossible to attempt here any discussion of the Atonement.¹ But again we remember that we are not now concerned with the human side of our faith, but with Christ's revelation of God. What do we learn from the Passion of our Lord concerning God? Out of all that might be said I choose three points.

(a) In the Passion and Cross of Christ we see what our sin means to God. We naturally think of Him as indignant against sin; and this, of course, is right as far as it goes. But behind the indignation is the agony of love repelled. And He is willing to bear all that we inflict. When He is reviled, He reviles not again; when He suffers, He threatens not.² It is right to change the past tense to the present if what we watch as we gaze upon the Cross is not a mere historic episode, but the revelation at a moment of the Eternal God. And let us remember that it was not the sins which men call disreputable that brought Christ to the Cross. The outcasts of society had no quarrel against Him. It was the highly respectable sins of religious conservatism, of political ambition, of financial self-interest. What costs God such agony as only the Cross could reveal is not the monumental wickedness of a few monsters of iniquity, but just the sins that all of us indulge in more or less. There we see what each one of us is costing God.

(b) Because we see in the Passion what our sin

¹ Something with regard to all these subjects will be found in *Christus Veritas*.

² 1 Peter ii. 23.

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costs God, *we see there also the righteousness of God and the self-sacrifice involved in His free forgiveness.* Christ's doctrine of free forgiveness by itself would be open to the charge that it represented God as indifferent to moral conduct, and that it therefore was demoralising to men. But by showing us what sin means to God, our Lord refuted that charge before it could be made. If sin causes Him such pain, that is proof of the depth of the antagonism between His Nature and sin. Nor can anyone be encouraged by God's free forgiveness to make light of his sin when he sees in the Cross the measure of its evil. The love which freely forgives those who inflict such agony is not an easy-going amiability, nor can it do other than brace the wills of those on whom, in neglect of its own injuries, it bestows forgiveness.

(c) God made the world, and gave men the freedom which they have used to devastate the world. *Here we see God bearing, and by bearing destroying, the evil in the world.* The Cross represents the worst that evil could do; nothing in principle worse than the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord of love can ever happen. But through all the ages it has been by the Cross that Christ has destroyed the evil in men's hearts and in the world. Sin brought Christ to the Cross, and by the Cross Christ destroys sin. So what we find here is God bearing the load of the world's evil and, by bearing, destroying it. He enters into the very depth of our misery and helplessness. In the cry from the Cross, "My God, my God, why didst thou forsake me?" ¹ we seem to see

¹ Mark xv. 34; Matt. xxvii. 46.

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Him emerging from an agony where it appeared that God had failed Himself; so utterly does He accept all, and worse than all, that we can know of the load of evil. The self-sacrifice is absolute and without reserve. But by that sacrifice He abolishes the evil which caused the agony, and we find that the innermost secret of the heart of Godhead is triumphant sacrifice.

(6) For the Cross was not the end. It was real, and all for which it stands must be eternally true of God. But it is not the whole of the truth. Historically there can be no doubt that the Church of Christ rests not on the Cross but on *the Resurrection*. The Cross had shattered the disciples' faith; "we hoped"—but that is all over now—"we hoped that it was he which should redeem Israel."¹ And their shattered faith was restored when the Risen Lord proved His conquest of death by appearing to those who loved Him and had believed in Him. So St. Peter looked back to the first Easter as the day when not only the Lord, but also his own faith and hope, were raised from the dead.² Our Lord, we notice, never appeared to Caiaphas or to any who had rejected Him. That would have been again to give the sign from heaven which might convince men against their will. But to those who had loved and believed He showed Himself, and to Thomas, utterly loyal,³ but literal and unimaginative,⁴ He offered the evidence he asked for.⁵

¹ Luke xxiv. 21.

² 1 Peter i. 3.

³ John xi. 16.

⁴ John xiv. 5.

⁵ John xx. 24-29.

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Indeed, if the Cross had been the end, then, so far at least as concerns the revelation offered to men, God would have failed Himself. We might still have hoped that the life of perfect love was continued somewhere beyond our vision or knowledge; but in just the same way we might have hoped that God is love even if the life of perfect love had not been lived. But it would have been a shadowy hope. If God is love, He must for His love's sake reveal His love; if He has not revealed it we hardly can dare to hope that He is love. Therefore the Incarnation is necessary to any sure faith in the love of God. But this means that we are to see in the story of Christ's earthly life the expression of the very Being of God; and if the story ends with the Cross it expresses anything but that. For by the Name of God we mean the perfect union of absolute power and absolute goodness. In the Life and Death of Christ without the Resurrection we see the perfect goodness, but if that is all, the power of the universe would seem to be against it. Only in the Resurrection is this union of absolute power and absolute goodness found. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is more than the guarantee of His Messiahship; it is more than the pledge of our immortality; *it is the vindication of the Deity of God.*

(7) One more episode remains—*the Ascension*. Here, plainly, we have an acted parable. Our Lord, who after His Resurrection was able to appear among men as He would, was received up from them into the cloud of the divine glory.¹ I have

¹ Luke xxiv. 50-53; Acts i. 9; Mark xvi. 19.

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no doubt that by the cloud here, as in the story of the Transfiguration,¹ we are to understand the Shekinah.²

Till then the Father was known, as He still is, only through the Son. But those who would be in the presence of the Son must go where He was to be found; it might be in Galilee, it might be in Jerusalem. But now this was so no longer. Jesus, and all that He means of Divine Love, is now wherever God is; and that is everywhere. *His Ascension means indeed the withdrawal of His bodily and local presence; but that is withdrawn only so that His spiritual presence may be everywhere available.* Because He is "in heaven," He is everywhere on earth; because He is ascended, He is here.

We have completed our outline survey. I have not tried to argue or to meet difficulties, but merely to show you something of what I have found in Christ's revelation of God. There is much that may be said in argument, and it is right that we should try to understand as far as we may. But it is not chiefly by that method that we can test the truth of what has been before us; it is by the life of active and practical discipleship, in prayer and service. We shall find out whether these things are true if we take Him at His word when He says: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me;" "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

¹ Mark ix. 7; Luke ix. 34, 35; Matt. xvii. 5.

² Cf. e.g. 1 Kings viii. 10, 11.

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